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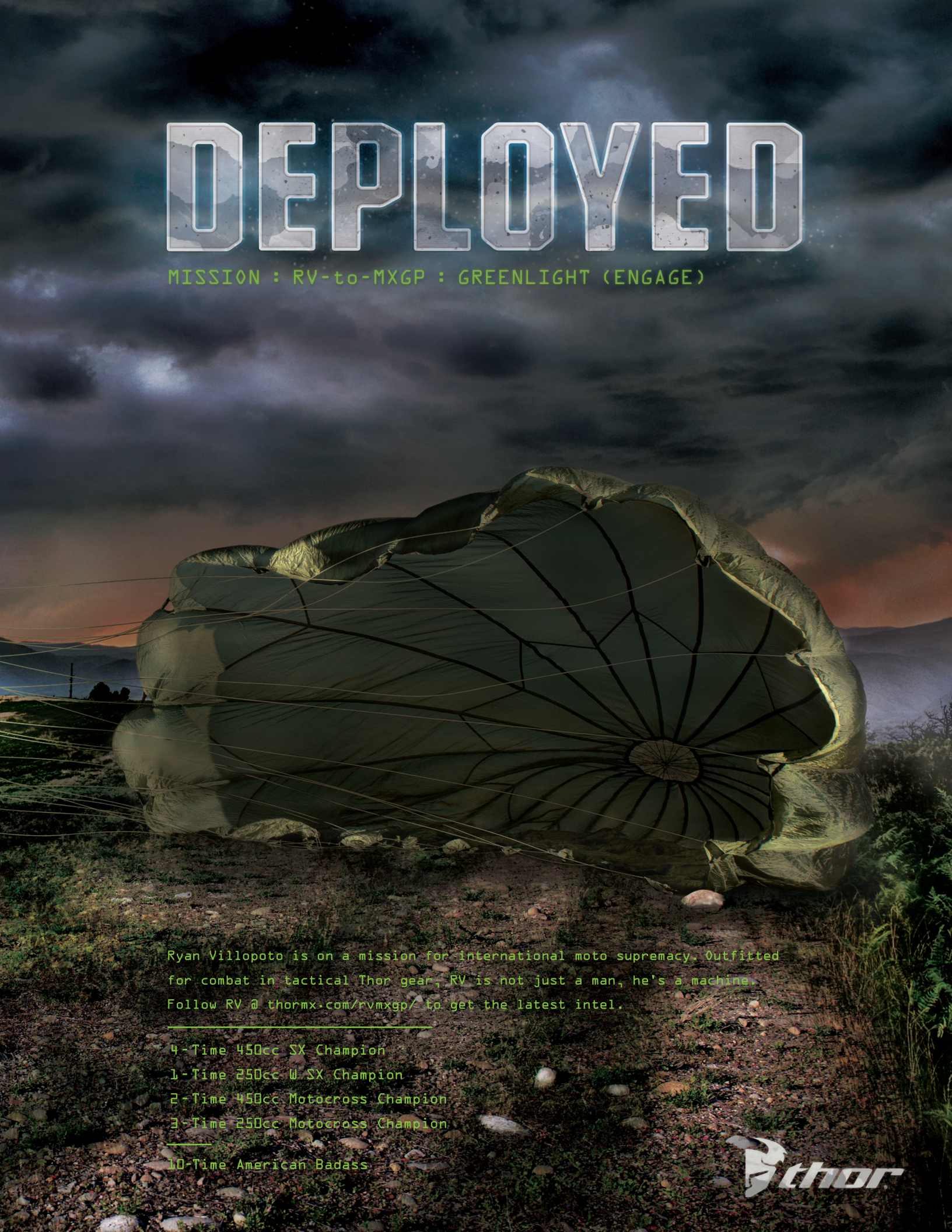
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FIM WORLD MOTOCROSS CHAMPIONSHIP

WELCOME TO THE REAL WORLD

Story by Geoff Meyer images Ray Archer, Kawasaki and J.P. Acevedo

When the lights came on at the opening round of the 2015 FIM motocross world championship there was a special atmosphere in the cool air at the Losail circuit in Doha, Qatar. What a wonderful season it is going to be as the likes of Antonio Cairoli, Clement Desalle, Ryan Villopoto and Gautier Paulin battle of the biggest prize in the sport.

If was easy for all the GP fans to welcome Villopoto to Qatar with a big "welcome to the real world", however as expected the multiple AMA Supercross and Motocross champion bounced back with a stunning victory a week later in Thailand. I have to admit, as a motocross fan, one who has followed the sport since the 1970's I can't remember being so excited to be at a motocross race as I was in Qatar.

While it as Max Nagl and Jeffrey Herlings who won the MXGP and MX2 classes in Qatar, the story was still the big four in the MXGP class and how they would come out of the opening round.

Red Bull IceOne Husqvarna rider Nagl the surprise MXGP winner knew all the focus was on the big four and that gave him the confidence to drive home some big points.

"I didn't expect this really. There was no pressure because everyone was looking at the fight between Antonio and Ryan, so it made it a little easier. I expected both those guys to be on the podium. I have no idea how long ago it was that Husqvarna won a Grand Prix, but it feels good to win this for the team and of course myself.

Herlings granted his first victory in 2015 despite not having much bike time was very emotional after his win.

"I was emotional, not many people know what I have gone through in the last months. I've only been on the bike a couple of weeks and I just had to get that operation to get the pins out because if I crashed again and hurt my leg the bone would have just shattered (with the pins in). I felt maybe 65%. I will go home now and train really hard for Thailand, do a lot of 45 minute motos.

THE BIG FOUR

Clement Desalle: "It is a strong result and I am happy with my riding and my feeling with the bike and the new stuff. We try to improve every year and this was a good beginning to the season. My starts can be better; this is something we can work on for the next race. We will fly back now and benefit from the time at home to get ready for Thailand."

Gautier Paulin: "It's the first race in the World Championship for me with Team HRC so I'm really happy to start the season like this, and it's always good to be on the box. We're not at the top, but the season is long so it's already good to be in third place. For sure you always want better but it's been a very smooth first grand prix. I'm really happy to work with my crew. We improve every time I go on the bike so we're in good shape."

Antonio Cairoli: "For sure it is normal that he's

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(Villopoto) getting used to these kinds of tracks. He was struggling a bit but that's what we do when we're in America. He will be in front in the next races when he's adapted a bit."

Ryan Villopoto: "I haven't raced since May last year, and it wasn't a good day but we scored points and that's definitively something we have to work on. I never had a schedule like that one for a long time, but I've got to get used to that and all the rest, including how the gate drops, how they do everything. We struggled a little bit with the start today, a little me and a little the bike, but we came back and got points. We've definitively some work to do, but that's part of it. We learned a lot this weekend and will be stronger at the next GP; we have to work on setup stuff, which make thinks a little bit easier. For me every time I went on the track this weekend things went better; in the second race I had some issues as my rear brake felt strange; I don't know if it's a rock or what, but it's part of the deal. We can make some stuff this week, even if the team doesn't go back home, and we will be better next weekend."

GP of Thailand

I've never seen speed like it, Ryan Villopoto on Saturday in Thailand. His qualification race win was just scary fast, so impressive it was looking like Sunday would be a cake walk, and it nearly was. Using too much energy though on the Saturday and in the opening moto Villopoto could only manage a third in the second MXGP moto. A GP win was still his with 1-3 scores compared to 2-2 by Desalle and 5-1 by Cairoli. In the MX2 class Herlings again went 1-1 and continued to ride safe and be smart in his quest for another MX2 title.

"This was a really tough weekend," Herlings said. "I don't have so much riding fitness yet because I have only been on the bike four weeks. The heat really got to me but we made our way through and won both motos. I also won the qualification so I can go home happy. The track is what it is and riders have to adapt but for sure it was kind of Supercross style, and with this hear, they humidity and such a track it was really tough. Sometimes you have to fight through a wall and that's what I did. Now I have three weeks to recover so I'm going to rest, recover and start training again on Wednesday.

THE BIG FOUR

Ryan Villopoto: "We only had two days to test when we went back to Europe but we made good progress with the bike. We made some big suspension changes and then some fine tuning here. I think the track here is not only new for all of us, it is also a little more jumpy than the usual GP track and suited me. For sure there will be weeks when a track suits me best, and other weeks when the track suits the European guys. I didn't ride this sort of heat for one and a half years, and it even started snowing when we were training in Belgium on Tuesday, so it was a shock change for all of us. I guess I have some things to learn too. I also backed off my pace in the qualifier but I think the other guys did so even more to save energy in the heat. There's a strategy to GP racing but I'm gradually getting used to it. I got pushed around a little in the first few turns of race two but when I got to third I just tried to be smart, and at this stage of the season a safe third is better than risking a crash. It's cool to come here to Thailand and see things which you would normally only see in the movies; it's a bizarre experience."

Clement Desalle: "Yesterday when I did my first lap of the track here I was quite surprised by it but then it became better and better. My starts were better today and that's a positive thing. Two strong results and that's important because my goal for the moment is to be like that every moto. I'm happy with my feeling on the bike and the control I have. I am trying to enjoy myself as much as possible because I know that is when the results come. We will do some testing now and I'm excited about the chance to get a bit better in small areas. It is great to

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Antonio Cairoli: "I made some mistakes over the weekend, especially in the qualifying. Then in the race you need to have a good start to be in front and you need to be on the inside on the corner and that was very important. I was a bit too wide with my seventh place then I got pushed to the outside. I had to regroup and settle my speed but after I went outside the track I was back at about seventeenth and I tried to charge to be in front again. It was not bad to end up fifth but not what I expected from my race. Then I was able to get a good start in my second race to be out in front and to make a good rhythm on a track that was very dangerous. I like jumps but this was way too much and also some were very sketchy. It was very hot and you are not completely focuses so it's very easy to make a mistake."

Gautier Paulin: "I have two comments from today: I'm really sad because of my crash, but I'm really happy because of my riding. I think I'm the only one who was doing so many big passes. In the second moto I crashed on the third corner but it wasn't my fault as I got hit by another rider. I was on the ground and another rider rode over me but I managed to get back to sixth, with a shorter moto. I think I would have been fourth with my pace. In the first moto, I had two crashes. I landed on Rattray when he changed line and I was already in the air, and the second was my fault. But I'm happy with my riding after the crashes; with the way I was riding to get back and the lines I was choosing to make these passes. On paper it's not bad, but we're just looking forward to the next GP now."

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Dean Ferris interview

REBUILDING IN 2015

Story Geoff Meyer images Bavo

Australian Dean Ferris is working hard to return to that place he was in September of 2013 when he shocked the world at the Monster Energy Motocross of Nations. It was also a season that saw Ferris battle at times with the seemingly unbeatable Jeffrey Herlings and really put himself on the world map. Unfortunately since that stunning MXoN performance the Aussie has suffered his share of injuries and back luck.

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We caught up with the Husqvarna factory rider and asked him about the opening two rounds of the FIM motocross world championship, and also how he is coming back from two injuries in 2014.

Motocross Illustrated: Dean, you showed a little better form in Thailand than you did in Qatar. How were those two races for you?

Ferris: Qatar was rough I ran into problems all day Friday, and Saturday was hit and miss. I felt like in the last moto in Thailand that we are in the right direction with bike set-up. I don't want to complain, but it's pretty hard to prepare in Europe with the terrible weather, but my mechanic has been working hard and I have been putting him through his paces and he's working well, so that is positive.

Motocross Illustrated: You looked a lot better in Thailand, running top ten in both moto's at times.

Ferris: Qualification I was 14th in timed qualification and 15th in the race. On the Sunday in Thailand I was solid in the first moto, riding well and running 9th and with two laps to go I crashed, then I crashed again and in that heat you are just completely done. I was completely finished after moto one. Moto two I was glad it was shorter, I have been in Europe for three months so it wasn't like I was used to that warmth, or anything, but the same for everyone I guess. I had a good start in the second moto, and finish ninth and I got some points and something to work on. It's frustrating because I know where I was before my injury, but we will work hard and hopefully with

RENTHAL

the break between Thailand and Argentina I can work on it and come to the third round feeling better prepared.

Motocross Illustrated: I can't even imagine what it's like having the 2014 you had. There was no structure at all in your season was there?

Ferris: Last year there was no stability, crazy year for me. I mean it was like America, home, injured, back to America, then to Europe, injured, home, then back to Europe. I decided that I would come to Europe, spend the winter and live in Belgium and I started with my trainer and I didn't leave Lommel. I didn't even go out of town for three months, at the gym every day. I didn't go home for Christmas as much as I missed my mates and family, so this time I just buckled down and try and have a solid season. Stay in Europe all year and work with the people in the team.

Motocross Illustrated: Are you looking forward to circuits like Valkenswaard where you will be more comfortable?

Ferris: I never thought about it, I didn't like Thailand, but Qatar was good, but it was too early for me condition wise. I look forward to getting to some real motocross tracks and I will be more solid on those tracks, but you need to focus on the race you are at, so that is what I did for the opening two rounds.

Motocross Illustrated: So what's it going to take for you to be back where you were in 2013?

Ferris: The weeks before Thailand we made some progress with the bike and I need to get in better shape. Just keep working forward with everything we can do.

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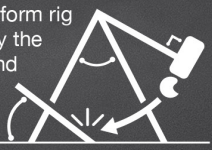

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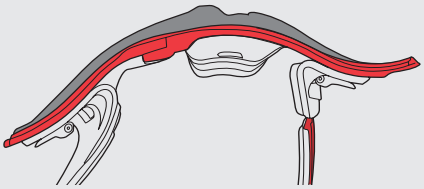

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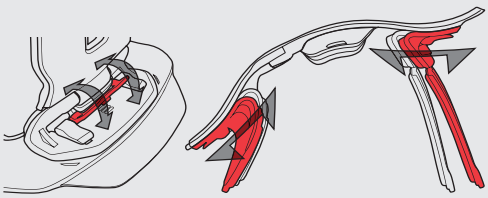

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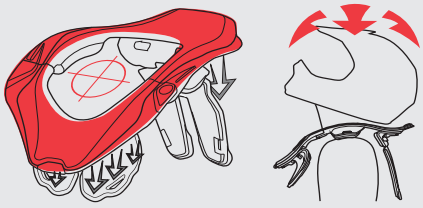

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Tyla Rattray interview

STILL A LEGIT CONTENDER!!

Story Geoff Meyer images J.P. Acevedo

Monster Energy Kawasaki rider Tyla Rattray really struggled at the opening round of the FIM motocross world championship in Doha, Qatar. The South African came in expecting the world and walked away with just 16-17 results and nine points. Well below his expectations and that of his team. Many looked at the 2008 MX2 world champion as a rider on borrowed time, his career nearly over. What you never should do to a fighter like Rattray is count him out, and in the second round in Thailand last weekend he turned it around and came through with 8-8 results and 26 points. A big improvement, but Rattray wants a lot more.

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Q: Tyla, two weeks ago in Qatar you really didn't look comfortable at all. What was the problem for both you and Ryan in Qatar?

Rattray: Qatar was a tough weekend for me, for the team, for Ryan, for everyone. We were not where we wanted to be; we did a lot of testing, with suspensions, we thought we had good settings going there, but the GP tracks are much different than the US tracks and where we've been testing in Europe. In this case we returned to the drawing board, and did some testing. Sometimes you have to deal with the circumstances, and do the best that you can.

Q: You and Ryan looked way better in Thailand. You must have been super pumped for yourself for the team and for Ryan?

Rattray: It was way better than Qatar. I mean in Qatar were where a long way off. We went back to Belgium, rode for two days and then managed to do some good testing. It wasn't perfect for riding because of the weather. We tested a bunch of suspension stuff and we both felt better in Thailand.

Q: Can you explain the weekend in Thailand for me?

Rattray: I was happy with my weekend, I had great starts, I holeshot the first race, but Desalle and I hit, we hit in the second turn, I lost a couple of places. Second moto I was like fifth out of the gate, but I cased one of the doubles and bent my brake lever, which was bad luck.

Q: Now onto Argentina and more improvements I guess?

Rattray: It was two solid rides, not where I want to be, I feel I can get higher. We will do some more testing. My fitness was good I need to work on my speed, but it was a good weekend for our team with Ryan winning and now we go and test and

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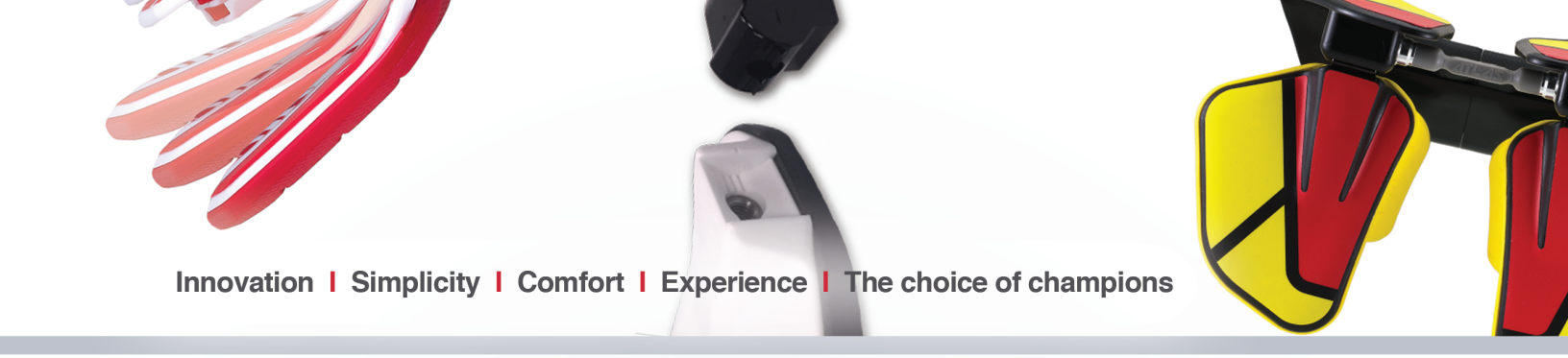

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JEFFREY HERLINGS INTERVIEW

TAKING WHAT IS HIS IN 2015

Story Geoff Meyer images Ray Archer

Red Bull KTM Factory rider Jeffrey Herling should be the World MX2 champion, well, in theory anyway. He is in a class of his own in the MX2 class and has proven that once again in the opening two rounds of the 2015 series. Going 1-1-1-1 in Qatar and Thailand. Check out what the Flying Dutchman thought of his poor preparation and surprise at being so quick in such a short time.

Motocross Illustrated: Jeffrey, can you explain how you felt after such a difficult period in your career?

Herlings: The last 18 months have been so mentally tough, but we kept fighting and now we are up and running. I am way calmer now as a racer, because I don't want to be in the hospital again. I got first in practice and then first in qualification, so we will see how it goes. We came from a long way away. I mean first time in my career I had so much bad luck, you know went through a lot of things and so many thing that we didn't talk about. Two and a half weeks ago I rode the bike and I wasn't sure how I would be here. Such a short time on the bike, so many surgeries and we are just so happy to be here and be healthy, that feels great.

Motocross Illustrated: Just a quick question about the MXGP class and all the hype. What is your opinion in the whole Villopoto versus Cairoli thing?

Herlings: I am busy with my own class, but MXGP is so amazing. I mean Villopoto versus Cairoli is really hyped up. I couldn't wait to see the first MXGP race in Qatar. When you have such a great rider like Villopoto and having the

two fastest riders on the planet racing against each other that is pretty special. I mean we all know about Antonio, but Ryan coming over here as the top AMA guy, we never get that so for sure it's special. I don't mind the MX2 class being under the radar.

Motocross Illustrated: You had a tough time with Dylan Ferrandis this weekend didn't you?

Herlings: Dylan (Ferrandis) was riding really well, but I didn't want to blow myself out and I knew I had to do two 35 minute moto's. I thought I needed to back off at one point, and let Dylan go, and he did a double jump and I didn't see that coming and he passed me and then pulled away. I kept riding my own pace then closed the gap and overtook him. Again second moto we both had a good jump at the gate, I got to the front and just controlled the race. The last laps I got pretty emotional.

Motocross Illustrated: You were very emotional after you second moto win and scoring the GP victory. Tell us what brought that on?

Herlings: I have been in hospital a lot and so much bad luck and I didn't expect to win and I was training and struggling with my leg. Finally have some luck and I've had like 43 GP wins or something but this one was special, not special because I was riding well, because I wasn't riding that great.

Motocross Illustrated: How did you pull up with your body after the weekend?

Herlings: It is sore already, we hardly had time to do two times 25 minute moto's to prepare for Qatar, and after my first practice I woke up the next day and felt like a train had ridden over me. I was so stiff, but we did some riding in Spain, hard pack and easy tracks. I will go home and ride a lot, I have only been riding for a couple of week, but between Qatar and Thailand there will be a lot of 20 minute moto's going down.

THAILAND GP

Herlings: I felt the heat for sure. I was riding and ok, but the last few laps I started feeling sick and started throwing up, but I kept riding, I managed to win the moto and I got off the bike and the heat got me, I pretty much fainted and had

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a tough time. I got some food in and second moto I was pretty good. Second moto I didn't have trouble. In the second moto I tried to save my energy because I was worried I would get sick again.

Motocross Illustrated: How do you prepare for that?

Herlings: It was tough to prepare for this race, something we can't get used to being back at home. We trained between Qatar and Thailand and it was like five degrees and we knew it would be tough. Two long motos but we will did our best. I think for passing the track last year was better, but the track is what is it and we just had to adapt.

Motocross Illustrated: They shortened the races by five minutes, did that help, and was it a good idea to shorten the race?

Herlings: I mean five minutes isn't that much, I think three laps more doesn't make that much difference, but if you see the second race there were a lot of guys not racing, guys like Tixier, Gajser, Seewer and more. At one point it starts to get dangerous and if you see how many riders fainted and DNFed, then it was a smart thing to cut the distance of the races.

Motocross Illustrated: Were you surprised by your team-mate Jonass over the weekend?

Herlings: I saw his results from Valence and Italy and I knew he had a good winter training and I am not that surprised. I am really happy for him, he made his first GP podium, and think from here on he keeps on rolling and get

more podiums.

Motocross Illustrated: In 2014 you talked about the perfect season and it for sure wasn't the perfect season for you. This year you talk about taking it easy and being happy with top five or whatever. Is it maybe better to not put so much pressure on yourself?

Herlings: I mean, in 2013 I missed out on two moto wins because I missed two races with injury. Last year I also missed like one or two moto wins, and then the injury came in with a broken femur and it does bring extra pressure. I won 12 out of the 12 last year when I was in good shape, I lost the fights but lost the war, so it's important to stay healthy and going undefeated isn't my goal, my goal is to be world champion.

Motocross Illustrated: In talking about MXGP you must get a little excited at the chance to maybe race them at the end of the season if you can wrap up your title early?

Herlings: You know, it's a long way to go and we planned stuff last year, race MXGP in Lommel, go to Unadilla, hopefully win there, but everything changed in two seconds. It's hard to plan stuff like this, but the main goal this year like I said it's about staying consistent, stay out of trouble and hopefully get a championship back. It's tough, Dylan is really good this year, Pauls has surprised everyone, it is never easy to win. It's going to be a long season.

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